MAISON&OBJET RISING TALENT AWARDS
CHINA
PRESENTED BY DESIGNCHAIN

MAISON & OBJET
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Firmly established as a major event for the global design community, the 2019 Rising Talent Awards organized by MAISON&OBJET look eastwards, exploring China’s fast-developing design scene. As the leading platform for promoting promising young designers around the world, the MAISON&OBJET Rising Talent Awards China presented by our long collaborative partner DesignChain which offers emerging Chinese talents the chance to introduce their work to an audience of international professionals.

Following the success of the United Kingdom, Italy and Lebanon editions, China will showcase its Rising Talents at the Exhibition Centre – Paris Nord Villepinte, from 18 to 22 January 2019. The decision to focus on China’s young designers is testament to the country’s rapid design-led growth, reflecting MAISON&OBJET’S efforts to remain at the forefront of international design progress and development.

A NEW IDENTITY

China’s burgeoning design scene reflects the country’s aim to become a global player in design, creativity and innovation. Life in today’s China moves quickly, and the design industry’s rapid development reflects wider society’s growth and progress. A decade of change is crafting a new Chinese aesthetic, with increasingly higher standards of professionalism and a renewed commitment to good craftsmanship, innovation and quality. This has impacted both how designers see themselves, and also how their work is viewed in China – and around the world.
It is clear that China’s young talents are working hard to forge a new identity. Busy exploring new ways of thinking about design, some prefer to delve deep into the Chinese psyche for inspiration whilst others embrace multicultural influences. Such back and forth cultural dialogue creates an interesting melting pot, with new designers and companies popping up almost daily. Says Rising Talent Awards Jury Member Luca Nichetto: “What is most interesting is the Chinese designer’s search for identity, to not just be a look-like of Western design but how to fold in the centuries-old rich Chinese craftsmanship heritage and tradition. There is much proof they are going in the right direction. I am very curious to see how this will evolve.”

Whilst there is no shortage of creativity, China’s design support networks are a work in progress. The challenge is to build upon the country’s reputation as an industry supply chain leader and find new ways to offer design opportunities to the younger generation. This goes hand in hand with a rising social and environmental conscience among designers, some of whom are making it a priority to think about how their work impacts on their world.

As designers have changed, so has China’s design-loving public. Whilst open to international aesthetics and lifestyles, they are increasingly prepared to embrace their cultural identity through design – a move that can only be good news for the development of the industry. Says Luca Nichetto: “Currently, the Chinese middle class is very much interpreting design as art, but as it shifts to more design as function it will be exciting to see how it will impact both Chinese design and what we from the West will learn from it. My personal hope, and goal, has been to focus instead on high craftsmanship and heritage – objects one is proud to own, admire and pass onto the next generation.”

“What is most interesting is the Chinese designer’s search for identity, to not just be a look-like of Western design”
The six personalities invited by MAISON&OBJET and DesignChain to sit on this year’s Rising Talents Selection Jury are experts in their field, contributing to, and knowledgeable about, the contemporary Chinese design. In-depth insights into China’s design industry come from Liu Xu, Chairman of China National Interior Decoration Association and Xing Tong-He, Former Chief Architect of Shanghai Xian Dai Architectural Design (Group) Co. Ltd., one of the largest architectural firms in the world.

Sculptor and artist, Qu Guangci, founder and artistic director of design brand X+Q Art, known for its limited edition handcrafted sculptures, brings his blend of creativity and business acumen to the panel. London-based lighting and furniture designer Tom Dixon has wide experience in global design and commercial application, whilst Italian industrial designer Luca Nichetto, operates in both the global and the Chinese marketplaces. Lastly, Shanghai-based Lyndon Neri & Rossana Hu of inter-disciplinary architecture and design practise Neri&Hu, offer their views on the modernity-heritage debate in today’s China.
SIX EMERGING DESIGNERS

This year’s selection process included five young designers selected by members of the Rising Talents Awards Jury, and one young designer selected via a Call For Entry. Frank Chou, Chen Furong, Mario Tsai, Hongjie Yang, Ximi Li and Bentu rank as some of the brightest young design powers in the country today. Exemplifying talent, emotional depth and creativity, these six designers bring innovation and energy to their work. Some prefer a China-centric approach, others have absorbed multicultural influences by studying, working and living abroad. But all are committed to forming a new Chinese language of design. Says Jury Member Lyndon Neri of Neri&Hu: “With the rapid growth of the Chinese economy and the need for a cultural expression of its own, we see a large number of emerging designers that have started to create their own voice that deals with issue of heritage and identity.”

Whilst their styles might diverge, one thing is clear: these six talents are setting new standards, whilst balancing creative versus commercial demands. “China has, for many years now, been the world’s industry supply chain leader and is fast turning into a hotbed for design opportunity for both local and global designers,” says Luca Nichetto. “Chinese designers are realising the power of their own proximity to an established manufacturing base, and are taking full advantage of it.”
Growing up in China’s capital city, Beijing-born Frank Chou witnessed first-hand the dynamic changes afoot in his hometown over the past few decades. After graduating from Beijing Forest University, where he majored in Materials Science and Engineering, with a focus on wood science and technology, he travelled between China and Europe, accumulating international industry experience in furniture design, engineering and trade work. In 2012 he set up Frank Chou Design Studio, where he produces elegant, long-lasting, functional pieces which represent contemporary Chinese thinking, yet finely balance the needs of modern Oriental and future Oriental lifestyles. Frank has attracted worldwide attention through exhibitions at international design shows and collaborating with global brands, both as a designer and strategic consultant.
His latest collections portray an increased refinement in design thinking. A minimal yet comfortable Middle chair, inspired by the traditional Chinese bamboo chair; a modular Combo sofa which draws on handmade upholstering processes, bought up-to-date by witty combinations of leather, wool and fabrics; and a geometric Stack table, with its mottled brass-coloured finishing, which fuses architecture and artistry.

**FRANK CHOU**

**MAISON&OBJET:** How do your designs reflect the style and spirit of modern China living?

**FRANK CHOU:** For me, the concepts of "Modern Chinese” and the Social Stage of China“ are the real goals behind my work. If you understand these goals, and proceed from these two points, then the designs naturally reflect the style and spirit of “modern China living”. My designs do not have obvious Oriental characteristics, but actually the design ideas and inspirations originate from deep-seated thoughts about modern and future Oriental lifestyles.

**M&O:** What key moment has been the most defining in your career so far?

**FC:** The day I heard two strangers discussing our designs. Whether comments are good or bad, and when we successfully predict the reasons why people choose our designs, it gives me a sense of accomplishment. The designs come to life by satisfying people’s needs, promoting consumption patterns, aesthetic patterns and even industrial forms.

**M&O:** What do you think is the biggest challenge facing designers in China today?

**FC:** I believe the underlying foundation of design implementation is too weak. A design concept cannot be isolated and implemented independently. We need design commerce, design manufacturing, design management, brand consumption as well as design business values and ecological platforms behind us. The design scene in China is just beginning, yet perhaps this may be the best period for designers. Every industry in China, including the furniture industry, is rapidly entering a stage of transformation which will lead to many design requirements. This will provide many opportunities for designers in every field.
“The design ideas and inspirations originate from deep-seated thoughts about modern and future Oriental lifestyles”
Chen Furong, founder of lighting, furniture and accessories brand WUU, designs timeless, research-driven collections which blend handcrafted techniques with a modernist vision. Born in Zhangzhou, Fujian Province, he studied at the Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts, majoring in Integrated Design. After graduation in 2012, he travelled with some friends more than 10,000 kilometres across China in a van, interviewing local creatives for an exhibition called Metaphysics. This led to his decision to embrace design as a lifelong career. Furong founded his Xiamen-based studio in 2014 and later that year participated in Homeland magazine’s Artisanship Revival program, where he worked closely with local craft artists in Fuzhou, combining technology with traditional crafts.
MAISON&OBJET: Why is the notion of timeless beauty integral to your designs?

CHEN FURONG: From the beginning, WUU has been passionate about researching materials and crafts, and applying the results to our products. This distinguishes us from mass produced items. Through design we want to return an object to its original essence, allowing it to endure both in terms of aesthetics and usefulness. As a result, our brand goals and overall vision always portray “A Sense of Timelessness”.

M&O: What do you think is so special about Chinese craftsmanship?

CF: China's craftsmanship has a long history which is rooted in the development of our country’s traditions and culture. We have many fascinating crafts, from simple to exquisite, and all reveal Oriental characteristics and thinking. However, because of rapid economic development, craftsmanship has become less important. When the pace slows down, and we have more time to explore our feelings about life, then Chinese craftsmanship will develop further in contemporary society.

M&O: During the design process what comes first - form or function?

CF: The ideal design combines functionality, form, aesthetics and user experience. It also needs to adapt to current production conditions and be of a reasonable cost. The design process for me is different depending on the product; sometimes my inspiration comes from a beautiful, poetic picture and this becomes the first step in the design process. My experience is that a designer needs to be calm and face all problems encountered in the design process. Sharing work and thoughts can both provide help and deepen your experience to allow you to find the design direction that you need.
“The ideal design combines functionality, form, aesthetics and user experience.”
Furniture, product and industrial designer Mario Tsai prefers to “use less, design better”. After graduating from Beijing Forest University where he majored in Furniture Design and Manufacturing, Mario travelled around China and Nepal to experience different lifestyles. He moved to Hangzhou in 2013 where he opened a shop with his younger brother, and in 2014 set up the Mario Tsai Studio. He has since worked with clients from China and Europe, and has participated in furniture fairs globally.
MAISON&OBJET: Your mantra is “Use Less, Design Better”. How does this apply to your work?

MARIO TSAI: I always try to use less materials and production processes to create better designs. This not only reduces the cost to my clients but also saves resources and helps protect the environment. It’s a principle to remind me to follow a sustainable design approach. For example, I designed a table system that needs only a singular leg design, to be used with different sized tables. The leg can also be replaced if it breaks. This not only reduces unnecessary program and management costs during the production process, but the replaceable parts means the product can last longer.

M&O: How important have trade fairs been in your career?

MT: Very important! My design career started at a fair in Shanghai in 2014, and I got my first client in Frankfurt in 2015. I participated in some design fairs in Milan, London and Stockholm. Trade Fairs are platforms for young designers to show their creations to manufacturers all over the world; I find I always get some chances to collaborate with different companies during the fairs.

M&O: What does being named a Rising Talent mean to you?

MT: The Rising Talent Awards is a perfect platform for young designers to show their designs and creations. It’s also my first exhibition in Paris. In a sense, our designs represent the new design power of contemporary China. I hope to get more attention and cooperation opportunities during this exhibition.

With a focus on research and sustainability, Mario’s tactile collections offer a clean, modern aesthetic. Sustainability and material research are key; he is committed to reducing excess material usage and improving both society and the environment through his works which include the aluminium tube-inspired Pig Side Table and the thoughtful, efficient Pure Desk.
“Our designs represent the new design power of contemporary China.”
Hongjie Yang was born and raised in China. He went on to study in the USA and at the Design Academy Eindhoven, Netherlands, where he received his Master's Degree in Contextual Design. After living and travelling abroad for the past 12 years, he is currently based in the Netherlands. His powerful works, which explore the divide between nature and culture, the born and the made, have been widely exhibited including in the USA, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, Italy and China.
HONGJIE YANG

Hongjie’s exquisite pieces appear naturally-formed, but closer inspection shows that technology has also played a role in their creation. His works pair sharp lines with a rubble-like texture that appears to fall away, like a relic from another planet. His aluminum Synthesis Monolith Mirror, Coffee Table and Bench are at once organic and machined; portraying an evolutionary arc starting from a primitive historical context and moving towards a smoother, elegant future.

MAISON&OBJET: How would you describe your work?

HONGJIE YANG: I focus on work that examines the dichotomy between nature and culture. I look at intervention and non-intervention, as intervention itself can be seen as part of a natural process. Many of my works search for a new class of aesthetics which transcends the divide between the power of human and nature. This parallel yet seemingly contradictory use of forms and materials allows mystery to rise. The works are like an archaeological dig, a discovery of something ancient which at the same time projects forward; like a snakelike rock repeatedly shedding its skin to create a newer, more refined version of itself.

M&O: What do you find inspiring about the idea of metamorphosis, of altering forms?

HY: It is through transformation that we find enlightenment. In my view, nature as we know it is coming to an end. We humans are, and always will be, a part of the whole natural system. There are forces which move in opposition to one another, often set into motion by our own actions, but these forces are contained within the larger system of growth and decline, life and death, light and dark, order and chaos - the dualities of existence. It is the convergence of these forces that is revealed through my work.

M&O: How have different country experiences influenced you as a designer?

HY: In the past 12 years I lived abroad in many cities and visited many countries. I feel lucky that I am able to experience a world with cultures, ranging from a nation of immigrants to Europe’s rich history, with its different languages and cultural backgrounds. In the European design scene, you can meet talented people from all over the world with amazing personal stories. Both East and West have played big parts in my life - and in understanding both of them I find inspiration. These experiences made me as a person and a designer, and I am still evolving. After a while, I stopped seeing design as a set of skills, rather it has become something very personal, a part of me. A journey of self-discovery.
“Many of my works search for a new class of aesthetics which transcends the divide between the power of human and nature.”
XIMI LI
www.urbancraftdesign.com

Shanghai-based Ximi Li holds a Bachelor of Industrial Design from the China Academy of Art, Shanghai, and a Master’s Degree in Furniture Design from the Polytechnic University of Milan. He worked for leading designers Andrea Branzi and Luca Trazzi in Italy and, upon returning to Shanghai joined Neri & Hu, acting as Chief Designer for 6 years. In 2016 Ximi launched independent design studio Ximi Li and furniture brand URBANCRAFT. Working to create timeless pieces that integrate East and West, Ximi is committed to global cultural fusion, quality and good craftsmanship.

Jiazhuang dressing table

Mirror Yuan
MAISON&OBJET: Among designers you have met, is there one in particular that left a strong impression?

XIMI LI: Andrea Branzi. He is a MASTER. You know he is a wise man when you are around him and see how he views the world, art and design. He is an artist, a designer and a practitioner of design philosophy. I first saw his works in 2008 when I was still a graduate student of Politecnico di Milano. I was in Paris for a project and had the chance to visit his exhibition at the Cartier Foundation. I was amazed to see works that cross the limits of art, design, and nature, yet integrate all elements perfectly. I worked for him from 2009 to 2010; he works and lives in the same house and I was able to observe how passionate he is and how he applies his design philosophy. He expanded my comprehension of design, encouraged me to explore possibilities, and helped me to acknowledge and understand the meaning and power behind design. It was a precious experience for me.

M&O: How do you integrate different cultural elements into your work?

XL: My works are influenced by my experiences in different countries and regions, my understanding and feelings towards different cultures, as well as my imagination. I was born and raised in the northern part of China, very close to Russia. As a teenager, I spent time in Beijing before I moved to Shanghai for college. Afterwards, I lived in Milan for graduate school and work for four years, and finally settled down in Shanghai. From north to south, east to west, the history, painting, liberal arts, crafts, details, and architectures of all the places I have lived and worked have left marks in my life and shaped my way of thinking. With my experiences in China and Italy, I ask myself if my designs can be understood by Europeans and if Chinese will resonate with my designs. I hope my works can be accepted and recognized by people from different regions and cultures.

M&O: What are your expectations as one of the Rising Talents?

XL: We have two practices: Ximi Li Design and URBANCRAFT. Based in Shanghai, Ximi Li Design works with furniture brands and retailers in terms of furniture, product, interior design and creative direction. We expect to exchange ideas with European brands, and collaborate on the creation of furniture, lighting and accessories. URBANCRAFT’s vision is to establish an international design brand that integrates Chinese heritage with craftsmanship and diversified cultural elements. We want to have conversations with global audiences and show our works to the European market, forming partnerships with distributors and retailers.
“My works are influenced by my experiences in different countries and regions, my understanding and feelings towards different cultures, as well as my imagination.”
Design director Chen Xingyu founded design brand Bentu alongside Xu Gang, Peng Zeng and Chen Xingguang in 2011. A former Industrial Design graduate from Guangzhou University, Xingyu works to meet the problems raised by a rapidly developing society, recycling materials that others may deem waste – like coal cinder, construction waste and bone ash - and transforming them into furniture, lighting and accessories. His Guangzhou-based studio is known for experimentation, exploration and innovation, combining environmentally-friendly materials with commercial appeal, an approach which has won numerous awards, including a 2017 Red Dot Design Award.
BENTU

Bentu’s latest Terrazzo Collection recycles ceramic waste and also offers hope for a sustainable furniture industry in the city of Foshan, the world’s largest ceramic industry hub. The collection looks to the original texture of terrazzo, and uses concrete, leftover stone aggregate and ceramic waste to make items like the Yuan Plantpot and the Tu and Planet Pendant Lamps. Part of the same collection, Bentu’s porcelain aggregate Table offers three sizes of tabletop and five leg heights, in multiple combinations.

MAISON&OBJET: How does your experience in industrial design influence your work?

BENTU: Industrial design is a discipline that emphasizes systematic thinking. It helps me to consider the application of materials and the maturity of production, as well as the operation of the whole system. Everything must return to a practical understanding of technique and industry. Bentu places the material experiment at the beginning of the whole process, and the product design exists in the whole chain as a form or means of transformation. In Bentu, our work is systematic, which results in rational thinking and comprehensive measurement.

M&O: Why is material regeneration important to your design outlook?

BENTU: The purpose of design is to discover the important problems existing in human society and to provide solutions. Yet nowadays, design has become an excuse for the emergence of a large number of new products, an important means of marketing and promotion. The speed of replacement between new and old materials is so quick that it is too late to even think about whether it is necessary for our society and environment. After China’s rapid development, the impact of overcapacity on land and society has been seen. As designers, we should do something. We pay attention to wastes and useless materials of the current industrial age, such as construction waste, coal cinder, daily ceramic waste, yak dung on the Tibet Plateau, bone ash, and even common stone leftovers. We then transform them into products and commodities by means of industrial production and design.

M&O: What is the role of designers in China going forward?

BENTU: I think the knowledge acquisition ability of Chinese designers is strong now, but their awareness of their position in society is vague. Today, design value is often used and recognized commercially. It leads designers and their audience into a cycle that believes this is what design really is. But the truth is more than that. There are many complicated problems in Chinese society that need to be solved. What we have to do is to face the world in good faith, to find problems and to solve them. This is the simplest, but also the most difficult thing, to insist on.
“The purpose of design is to discover the important problems existing in human society and to provide solutions.”
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Special thanks to:

Tom Dixon, lighting and furniture designer
Luca Nichetto, industrial designer
Lyndon Neri & Rossana Hu of inter-disciplinary architecture and design practise Neri&Hu
Qu Guangci, founder and artistic director of design brand X+Q Art
Liu Xu, Chairman of China National Interior Decoration Association
Xing Tong-He, Former Chief Architect of Shanghai Xian Dai Architectural Design (Group) Co. Ltd.

ABOUT DESIGNCHAIN

A leading design consultancy & home furnishing total solutions provider, offering sophisticated living concepts and quality product services for the high-end home design market. DesignChain is powered by a professional design consulting service platform which integrates over 1,000 premium international furnishing brands. All brands and services reflect the core beliefs of DesignChain: quality life, eco-friendly, factory direct and a worry-free sales process.

MAISON&OBJET is celebrating the Lunar New Year with the Galeries Lafayette Paris Haussmann its historical partner, from the 25 January to the 19th February 2019 by showcasing the RISING TALENT AWARDS CHINA in their iconic department store.
ABOUT MAISON&OBJET PARIS

Since 1995, MAISON&OBJET has been the world’s foremost event for professionals of the lifestyle, interior design and design industries. Every edition brings together some 3,000 exhibitors and more than 90,000 unique visitors – of which 50% hail from outside France. Promoting new contacts and emerging talents, MAISON&OBJET presents twice a year the latest sources of inspiration by shedding insight into current and future trends. As a result, the event has become an effective catalyst for brand development and business growth. Launched in September 2016, the digital platform MOM (MAISON&OBJET AND MORE) offers a comprehensive overview of the latest news from and products by exhibiting labels, manufacturers, artisans, craftspeople and designers. A never-ending source of inspiration, it also provides a tool for visitors to establish a direct conversation with thousands of brands all year round.
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